LAND'S END

BY WILBUR DANIEL STEELE.

Love, The Life Guard—And New Worlds To Conquer.

Illustrated by C. D. Batchelor

THE year was dying; day was dying; there was a tale that the woman in the house on the last hill was dying; the wind alone was making.

It seemed fit that this should be the last house in the world. There was about the hollow thing something so wasted and blighted, and yet unconquerable, like an enduring disaster.

There was a long, loose-boarded porch with pillars across the front of the house and above it a second porch open to the sky, serving the "plastered tenement." Summer visitors sometimes took the plastered tenement. They never stayed long, and they never came back another season, because they could not bear the tragic beauty of the outlook from that hilltop. The land was no longer like itself, but already half in the grip of ocean; at the end, a huddle of sandbars; and then nothing but the ocean and a bell.

The woman on the bed in the plastered tenement was listening to the bell; a faint, repeated note borne in the bosom of the wind.

She might be twenty-five years of age, or forty. She was of rather slight figure. Looking at her face, one saw only the eyes at first. Large, clear, quick-moving between the low-arched lids, brown almost to golden and yet carrying an illusion of great depth, all the vital aspirations seemed to have come to center there, and the replica of the draughty candle, flickering either orb, seemed at home in them, as if they had been used to flame and wind. Save for a sanguine feather on either cheek bone, the rest of the face was glass white, the features tooled to a fineness so exquisite that they seemed transparent and almost luminous.

She was talking to herself.

"I've been so happy here with the sun and the stars and the wind and the bell. Sweet bell, so patient, so kind, calling to me, day in, day out! Mrs. Sparrow, where is the bell?"

Mrs. Sparrow, middle-aged, worn and fleshy, answered from her rocker in a shadowed corner:

"The bell, dearie? Why, it's out to the Head, dearie."

"The Head?"

"Yes. Yes. The end—b'yond the marshes, y'know. B'yond ever'thin', dearie."

"Oh! The end! So if I could go out to the end, then I could see the bell. I wonder, I wonder——"

"Hush, dearie! Now, now! Just be quiet, dearie. There! I hear Mr. Mendal coming up now." Mrs. Sparrow was already busy with her shawl and bonnet, relieved by the footfalls beyond the door. "I hope y'll feel smarter 'n the mornin'," she cast over her shoulder and stepped out of the room and closed the door behind her.

On the landing she confronted Mr. Mendal.

"She says how her money's all gone," she announced in a worried undertone. "She 'xpected to go a week back, she says."

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SHE would have liked to be an idealist, this Widow Sparrow; she would have loved not to have to think of the money part.

"If you was t' have four to home, an' the oldest too young yet t' fish!" She peered up at him. "'Tain't 's if I knew the first thin' about 'er—where she come from—if she's got folks or no!"

"Don't you worry about the money, Mother Sparrow," Mendal's voice was rich and quiet. "How does she seem tonight?"

"Oh, dear about the same. Waitin' 'Oh, dear, about the same. Waitin' to be took. I declare she don't seem t' be worrit much, though. She begins t' talk queer, though—talkin' 'bout goin' out t' the Head an' the like. It give me a start t' hear 'er."

"She's been out on the porch?"

"Yes, a while. I carried 'er in 'bout an hour ago. She don't seem t' care much what——"

"Yes, yes. Well, I guess that's all. Good-night, Mother Sparrow."

Entering the room, he drew the rocker from its corner and sat down beside the bed, leaning a little forward.

"Well," he said, "and how are you to-night?"

'Ah, dear friend, dear friend, you know how I am—this last night."

'Pshaw! You've said that every night the past week."

"Yes, my time was up almost a week ago. I've stolen a week, Mendal—a week of sweetness."

Her eyes went back to the candles—two of them now—on the washstand. Mendal's chin sank farther into his neck, and his beard, square and brown and thick, covered his chest. Both were thinking of what was to come.

The woman began again, her voice low and powerless and yet full of a kind of color.

"It's like a balcony here hung over the edge, beyond noise and hurry and naggings and heartbreaks, little loves, tiny hates; beyond time and space, Mendal; beyond everything but the bell and the end. I—I've been wondering——" She drew one hand from beneath the bedclothes.

"I wonder if you would hold my hand, Mendal?" she asked. He leaned forward awkwardly and covered the white hand with his own brown one.

"Mendal, I wonder if you know—how—how—if you know what you've been to me. Down here at the end of things you've always known everything so well, you people here—your neighbors, your plastered tenement, your marshes, your yesterday, your tomorrow. Dropping out of nowhere as I have, unexplained, nameless even, I must have struck like a—like——"

"Like an angel" There was a curious harshness in the man's voice.

"Is that why you've been so good and never asked? It was raining that night. And you were driving along the road in your buggy in the rain, thinking of—what were you think of, Mendal?"

"I was thinking how late it was."

"I remember hearing your voice before I went down—other voices, too. Were there some men with you, Mendal?"

"Yes, some neighbors. They got out and walked.

"And you brought me up here! Why did you bring me up here, Mendal, instead of taking me on into the village?"

"The village is noisy sometimes, the carts on the cobbles, children playing and all. And you were sick and frightened."

"Frightened! Oh, how terribly frightened, Mendal, at first. But now—only peaceful and happy watching the sunlight drift across the wall, listening to the bell out there at the last end, calling——"

Mendal got up suddenly to trim one of the candles. He stood staring for a moment out of the window that had grown black; then he wheeled around abruptly.

"How would you like a little music tonight for a change?"

The woman started to shake her head, and then, seeing by his face how he wanted it, she smiled and nodded. He left the room to return after a few minutes carrying a phonograph, a black-enameled horn and a handful of records.

"You see, we're not so countrified down here at the Head; after all. It's a great comfort; makes things more equal. I can sit down and listen to Caruso or Farnoe sing here as well as your man in New York city can. Now, here's one called the 'Mad Song,' for instance—'Mad Song from "Lucia" ' it is."

It was Farnoe singing there in the shipboard born. The record was old and badly marred in places; and yet, with all that, perhaps that "Rose of the World" had never sung her "Mad Song" against a background like this tonight—against fitful candles in a rocking house, against the starke orchestration of the wind, the distracted sand pelting the clapboards, the voice of the bell, remote and disembodied, like a lost sentinel, telling the breakers. At times the silver thread seemed to go out of the chamber, mount up through the roof, searching for something not to be found, and then come back again to break its heart in play.

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THE woman did not once move her eyes from Mendal,' who sat hunched on his elbows in a curiously relaxed posture. The aria came to a close, and the needle whirred on untended in the blank.

"It seems queer to me," he dreamed aloud, "how anybody could make-believe like that about a thing like inscanity; make a thing that isn't real so much more real than anything else. I suppose that's what they call being an artist."

"That isn't artistry!" The woman raised herself on an elbow. "That's not make-believe, as you call it. No, no—that was Farnoe herself—inside—something she was searching for, a flame for her to play with. Remember, Mendal, when she sang for that record she had just—just—It was about Terry Kew."

"In the play?"

"In the flesh! It was perilous, singing that, Mendal. No one could have dreamed how perilous but I. I could—because—I am Mary Farnoe."

For a moment the man continued in the same posture, as though he had not heard, or, hearing, had failed to comprehend.

"Mendal, look at me!"

He turned his head slowly.

"This is Mary Farnoe, here. Do you understand? This is 'The Beloved;' this is 'Rose of the World,' Mendal—'Fleur d'Amour'—'Farnoe'!"

He got up finally and stood with his hands behind his back.

"My house is honored." he stammered with an awkward bow. Then he continued to stare down at her till she cried at him in her strengthless voice:

"And still you don't ask me how I came here—why I came? Have I had to come to the end of the earth to find a man who would ask nothing of me? Sit down again! Nearer! There!

"I'll tell you, Mendel. Because I couldn't bear their watching and waiting and pretending; I couldn't bear their not knowing that I knew. Oh, Mendal, I couldn't look forward to the whisperings and telegrams and bulletins. I've amused the street all my life, Mendal—wasn't that enough? Must I die for them in the paper each morning along with their ball games and stocks and coffee? And then I was frightened, too. Mendal, do you know what it is to be frightened?"

A faint color dyed her cheeks, like the sun seen through a shell. She raised herself higher on the pillow, and her voice grew stronger:

"If they'd only told me, Mendal! I went to pieces at the symphony that night, but they were so kind and made nothing of it. I had to get it from a hysterical, eavesdropping maid at the hotel. Three weeks to live! Mendal! Mendal! I who had loved life so, faithless as it had been!

"And then there was the train; the hot, bright, varnished cage rushing me away through the dark; the nurse in and out; little Blomberg in and out, puckering his fat forehead, smoking hard, trying for once in his life to be gay. Poor little Blomberg; after all, I made him—the great manager. Norway was somewhere in the train, too, covering me for the A. P.—like a—a hanging, Mendal.

"They were taking me somewhere for a rest, Blomberg said. But why then the wire for Dr. Westcountry to meet us? Didn't they imagine I knew who Dr. Westcountry was, what he was?

"They were all asleep, even the nurse. The train was a nightmare. It smothered me. I got to thinking, 'Am I Mary, or am I Farnoe?' I said over and over, out loud.

"The train stopped for something. I crept out. I had to have air. Another train from the opposite direction came in between me and my own. It was like the hand of God. I turned my back and started to run along a road. I must have been quite out of my head with it all, for the train, I remember, turned down the road after me; I could hear it thundering through the trees behind me—the rain, I suppose. How far did I come, Mendal?"

"Five miles—or better."

"How could I? I don't remember it. There was a sign-post under a lantern with three white fingers weeping for me, and there was a dog that trotted beside me for a while; I don't know how long. And by and by you were behind me, and that frightened me more than anything else had. You were Blomberg coming to get me; you were Dr. Westcountry coming to do something to me; you were Norway coming to 'cover' me; you were—— Oh, you must think me a silly, hysterical thing, Mendal."

"No!"

Getting to his feet, Mendal thrust his hands deep in his pockets and then took them out again, his beard still shaking with the savage negative. The woman went on talking, as if to herself now, arms outspread and eyes on the ceiling, her voice scarcely audible above the wind:

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"PERHAPS I died that night, really, and this is another life. It's been so sweet here; it seems as long already as the other was, looking back—that other little life, so crowded, so empty, so happy, so sad! There were triumphant moments in it, Mendy; I try to get hold of them now, and they slip away, one by one, as I come to them; mist, nothing. Only one stays, very small, so small that I had forgotten it till I lay here in the quiet sky. Just a man in the dark; a boy, really—a feverish boy crying for me to stop. It's like a fairy tale, where the thing that seemed so little eats up all the things that seem so big.

"'Fleur d'Amour' they called me, 'Flower of Love' that means, Mendal. Whatever would the Sunday papers have done without Mary Farnoe? What reams on reams they filled with their Farnoe, their queer, distorted Farnoe, whom I never knew. They wanted me complex, and I couldn't be anything but simple; they made me a butterfly, and I was a rock for faith. I forgive them. I can begin to understand an all-forgiving God. It's so easy to forgive—in heaven. I can even forgive the men who never loved me. I can even smile at them now. They all thought they loved me, poor things! Youth was what Tom Lord loved, I think. Bennington loved me for the crowds; Von Huhr because I was so essentially American; Belham because I was so essentially un-American. Terry Kew loved himself.

"I say, I forgive them. If they slip away, mist, nothing.

"And then had any one told me I was to look back out of the future and remember that boy as the only lover of Mary Farnoe. It's queer, isn't it, Mendal?"

"What?"

"To call him that. When he never spoke a word of love to me. I never saw him except once, and that in the dark; I don't so much as know his name. But why do you listen to my maunderings, Mendal? Haven't I asked enough of you, first and last?"

"No. I will listen."

"You won't hear. It's too phantasmal. It's just that he seems to fit in here with the wind and ocean and marshes and sea birds. He was an interne, I think. (Oh, just then I was getting well in a hospital, slowly.) He must have been an interne; he wore white, I remember, and looked like a ghost standing at the foot of my bed in the dark. I knew he had no business there, but, oddly enough, that wasn't my first thought. If he had a queer flair about me, perhaps I had a sort of one about him, too. It may have been just his attitude. At any rate my first impulse was to say aloud: 'You poor boy!'

"He started and stammered that he hadn't known I was awake. I don't believe there was ever such a queer conversation as that.

"'Why do you do it?' he asked, out of nothing.

"'Do what?'

"He wouldn't listen to my questions, but shook them off with a fevered impatience, his words seemed to get in the way of his thoughts.

"'I wish you'd stop! I wish to God you'd stop!'

"'Stop what?'

"'They're eating you up—burning you up! Can't you see they're eating you up as fast as they can?'

"'Who are?'

"'I wish, for dear Christ's sake, you'd run away from them,' he cried in a passionate whisper.

"I sat up in bed and stared at him. You can't imagine, Mendal, how weird it was. I wasn't frightened in the least. I forgot who I was and who he was.

"'Come around here beside the bed,' I said to him. He came, sank down on his knees, and buried his face in his hands, and when I laid a hand on his hair he was shivering all over. I had a sense of being a thousand years older than he.

"'You poor, poor child,' I said. 'You've fallen in love with Mary Farnoe, like the rest of them. What a pity! And you want me to run away with you; is that it?'

"He protested wildly. No, no, no! That's what I'm trying to tell you—not with anybody! Never let any one get a hold on you again. If only you could be turned to ice somehow. Ice, cold, quiet! Close the doors on them. Lock them out. They don't bring you anything! Always taking—taking you away, little by little, till one day there'll be nothing left of you!"

"He may have been older than I in years; I might have been his mother. I smoothed his hair, but I couldn't help smiling at him, he seemed so utterly outlandish. I tried tod tell him how we weren't made that way; how what there was to spend had to be spent.

"'You don't understand, poor lad,' I was saying when the night nurse's dash found him there beside my bed. He was discharged next morning, I heard."

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FOR a time there was silence, everything in the world seemed to have been said. Mary Farnoe's sentence had carried a curious feeling of finality, like the settling of a last account. She lay on her side with her hands clasped, searching Mendal's half-lowered face.

"Mendal!"

He looked up, moved by the change in her voice, and found her embarrassed as a girl with the color coming and going across her face.

"I—I don't seem to know how to say it, Mendal. You seem so big and solid and dependable; sometimes it almost frightens me to find myself clinging to you so for everything. You've been like a breath of clear air to me after the other sort of thing—their precious frailties, their precious personalities, their precious spirits, their whims. But out here, Mendal—why, you're nobody. And I'm nobody. It doesn't seem to matter much whether you—" She broke off for a moment. "I don't want you to laugh at me," she implored.

"Laughing at you'"

"No. It's about the bell, out there at the last end of everything."

Mendel checked her there by putting out a hand and covered both hers.

"You've been thinking about [illegible] a good deal lately."

"Oh, please don't think I'm romantic or imbecile than that, Mendal. It's me. I've always had that sa[illegible] passion, to see through, to go through to the end, whatever it might be. Listen, Mendal! Hear!"

"Do you mean," he put to her slowly, "that you would like to go out there tonight?"

He got up and moved to the door, where he turned with his hand on the latch.

"Do you think you're strong enough, on a night like this?"

"Yes, yes! I feel stronger than I have for weeks."

"I'll be back in a minute."

He came back into the room and stood over her, studying the face against the pillow.

"You look like a bride," he said.

Bending over suddenly, he wrapped the bedclothes tight about her, picked her up in his arms and went downstairs and out of the house.

Once beyond the half shelter of the porch, the wind claimed them. Mendal's first rush carried him as far as the break of the hill, but there he hesitated and looked down at the face against his shoulder, dim-gray in its muffings. His own was gray, and a bead of perspiration clung for an instant on his forehead before the wind whisked it away.

"Do you want to go?" he asked, bending so that his lips were close to her ear.

"Am I heavy?"

He shook his head savagely.

"What's that, Mendal—over there?"

He followed the direction of her eyes, slanting over his shoulder. Beyond Barnham Head village the moon was rising, casting a dome of light before it into the sky, and vertically across this dome, from a further abutment of the hill, rose the stark black shape of a cross.

"That?" he hesitated an instant. "That's the telegraph."

"But I didn't know——"

"It's come lately."

"Oh, what difference does it make, after all? Why do we stop here so long, Mendal?"

He started down the slope, waded through the bit of marsh at the bottom that sucked at his shoes, found the hard, uneven footing of the breakwater, and passed out once more into the wind.

It was one of those nights that come once or twice in an autumn, swept clean of all the dusts and mists of the world, everything shorn and incisive; even the sound of the water lashing through the crevices of the sea wall had an edged quality, like liquid blades playing in the rock. Mendal had to keep sharp watch of his path, for even in the growing light the tilted slabs were treacherous footing. When the arm about his neck, tightening, begged his attention, he had to bring up and stand balanced against the wind.

"What is it?" he asked. He bent to catch her answer.

"I'm getting so small, Mendal, and you're growing bigger and bigger all the while. And I don't hear the bell any more. You—Mendal, you're not fooling me?"

"No!" His voice was sharp. "The surf at the head drowns it now. You won't hear it any more till we come up with it."

He went forward again. Her weight, frail as it was, began to tell. When he had reached the square hewn boulder rising like a sort of keystone at the center of the wall, he had to pause a moment in its lee, resting his back against the rock.

"It is here?" she asked him.

"No, no! I'm only getting my wind; that's all."

"Why won't you look at me, Mendal?"

For some reason or other it seemed an effort for him. For a moment she lay there watching him.

"Why won't you say it, Mendal?"

Her hand crept up to touch his cheek, and it was whiter now than her own.

"You would have said it, Mendal, if I hadn't told you about—about me. But what difference can that make—now—out here? The world's gone. We're all there are, Mendal, one man and one woman. But why should I want you to tell me, after all? It's so different from anything else that ever happened. I can love you to the last depths, Mendal, without it's seeming so fatal a thing whether you love me or not. Of course, that would be sweet, incredibly——"

He had forgotten to be careful with her or with himself. His kiss left them both shaken and breathless. "You— You" He seemed unable to say anything but that: "You— You— You—"

* * * *

HE was going forward again, almost at a run. The breakwater came to an end; he was floundering up the rise to Barnham Head; one instant in the lee, the next, crushed and deafened, face to face with the driven sea. Farnoe's fingers dragged at his cheek.

"Where is it, Mendal? Mendal!"

"Look!" He pulled the blanket away from her face. A puff of spray like cannon smoke drove across them, blinding the eyes.

"Look again!"

Grayness swooned into blackness; a thin, wide tongue lashed out of the smother, glistening with dim stars, clotted with ropes of spume; licked up at them across the sand with a sinister hunger; fell back again, leaving a serpent of kelp at Mendal's feet, writhing and faintly luminous.

"Look!" he shouted for the third time, shaking her. "Out there! Beyond!"

But she had turned her face the other way.

"Why do you do this? Mendal! Mendal! Why do you frighten me so? Why don't you take me to the bell?"

"I am! It's out there—over the outer bar. Come!"

He started down the shining slope, but now she was crying terribly in his ear: "Mendal! Mendal! Mendal!"

"Good God!" he shouted. "What's the matter?" Stumbling back again, he stared into the staring eyes.

"Don't you want to go?"

They looked incredibly old, both of them! . . .

They were on higher ground and wire-grass was catching at Mendal's shoes and trying to trip him. He stumbled once and went down on one knee, but the sand was soft, and he did not lose hold of his burden. A building with two yellow windows came around a hummock to meet them.

It was hard for Mary Farnoe to remember what happened after that for a time. Whatever it was, it led to a kind of bed built into the side of a small room filled with papers and outlandish instruments and warmth and light.

Some one had hold of one of her wrists. She began to realize that it was Mendal, and that his eyes, fixed and unwinking, were holding her up out of something. There were others in the room: an old man with a blue coat and gray whiskers; still other men behind him.

"Where am I?" she asked with her lips, for she seemed to have no voice.

Mendal's eyes came down a little closer, still holding her tight.

"You're at Barnham Head, Mary Farnoe: at the life-saving station."

"I'm so weak. Dear me, so w-e-a-k."

"Of course you're weak. You'll be stronger by and by!"

Without moving his eyes, he gave some word or sign that sent the others out of the room.

"The broth," Mendal called after the captain. And then to Mary Farnoe: "Open your mouth and swallow this. It's a little brandy. There!"

She lay quiet as death itself, watching him. He began to speak with a painful deliberation, making each word count as a separate thing, hammering, hammering!

"Mary Farnoe, listen! You couldn't go through! You failed in that role; that gesture is gone. I proved it to you. You had hold of a fine fancy there; a deep, dramatic symbolism—Lands End, Eternal Ocean, the Bell calling, calling, day and night, from the bosom of Oblivion. A big idea—yes, yes. But it fell flat. Now you're starting all over again, on something new. Listen, Mary Farnoe! I want you to understand this; learn it by heart; it's the lines of your new role: There is absolutely nothing organically wrong with you now. That was all over two weeks ago. In a month you will be yourself. Here's another swallow of the brandy and then a little broth. You'll see how thoroughly I have it over you; the captain here will tell you I phoned about this broth before we left the house an hour ago. I'll hold you up a moment, so!"

The spirits and hot broth began to tell; a new color crept into her cheeks as she lay there, with no will of her own.

"You talk so queerly, Mendal; so different, so new. I—I hardly know you, Mendal." It may have been five minutes before she spoke again. "Why did they give me three weeks to live, then?"

"Three weeks as you were living then—on your heart and nerve."

"Why didn't you tell me before, Mendal—that I was all right?"

"What would have been the use? You wouldn't have believed me. No, no, Mary Farnoe; I don't think you'd believe anything in the world unless the stage were set for it—as if—well, you wouldn't have your life saved except in a life-saving station. Truth is a denouement or it is nothing."

Another minute passed while she gazed at him dreamily.

"Will I sing again, Mendal?"

"That's on the knees of the gods, Mary"—he tried to smile—"the gallery gods! You'll do what your audience expects of you, even the impossible."

"But M-e-n-d-a-l——" A hand came toward him across the covers, appealing.

"You remember what you said once, Mary? 'What's to be spent must be spent'?"

"But what if I was wrong, Mendal?"

He looked terribly tired and white. "And what if you were right?" he said.

He got up suddenly as if he were afraid of himself, and, turning to a telephone on the wall, took down the receiver: "Is this the Barnham Head House? . . . May I speak with—— Oh, is it you, Blomberg? Yes? We've turned the corner, Blomberg. May I speak with Norway? . . . Thanks!"

* * * *

IT was hard to wait there, staring at a knot in the paneling; he seemed actually to grow whiter and gaunter with every dragging second.

"Oh, hello! Hello! Norway? . . . It's Westcountry speaking, Norway. I'll give you a leader, Norway; put it on the wire tonight. 'Farnoe will sing in three months.' That's all. . . Thanks. Thanks, Norway. Good-night!"

"Now," he said, his eyes still on the knot, "Now you're playing to the old audience again. I'm tired," he went on. "And I'm afraid to look at you."

"Westcountry," came her wondering voice. "Westcountry! You're—you're Westcountry!"

"You're angry!"

When she didn't speak he had to cover up the silence somehow.

"Blomberg will be glad to get away. Poor Blomberg! The Barnham Head House isn't quite up to Blomberg's style, though he's been a surprising brick about it. And Norway. How they've played chess down there, and how they hate chess! I've wanted them to go, but they wouldn't. They were the ones you saw in the buggy with me that night. That was my train that came in between you and yours. It took us a little while to pick up the trail Mary, Mary, if you knew how I'd dreaded this moment, when I should have to tell you."

"Why?"

He had to look at her when she spoke so, and now it was his eyes that were bewildered and hers sure and full of light.

"I was afraid it might—Mary, can't you see that—what you called the 'balcony hung over the edge'—'one woman and one man—nobody and nobody'——"

"Was that sweet to you, too?"

"Sweet? Is it sweet when a dream comes true, even for a little while—a dream one's been alone with for ten years? Once I knelt in the dark, Mary, beside a bed in a hospital, very young and foolish and feverish——"

And there he was down on his knees again, with his face buried in her hands, and she was smiling at him again, but not because he was outlandish this time.

"I knew," she whispered. "I began to know almost a week ago. Do you know how? Well, there couldn't be two of you. I—I thought you were going to tell me tonight."

Her lips were against his cheek.

"Does that mean, Mary—that kiss—that it doesn't matter, after all? That even without my romantic trappings, rather gray and prosaic——"

Her low laughter was like a caress.

"The sea must be going down," she whispered after a long time. "I heard the bell, just then, very faintly."

"Yes! The bell's a masker, too. It's gone back to the role that made it famous—warning people off the bar."

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AND THERE HE WAS DOWN ON HIS KNEES AGAIN, WITH HIS FACE BURIED IN HER HANDS, AND SHE WAS SMILING AT HIM AGAIN, BUT NOT BECAUSE HE WAS OUTLANDISH THIS TIME.

THROUGH MINING FIELDS OF ALASKA AND NEVADA TO A SEAT IN THE U. S. SENATE

BY V. M. HUDSON.

SENATOR KEY PITTMAN'S Career Reads Like a Bit of Fiction—His Early Experiences in the Gold Territory of the Far North. In the Silver Mines of Nevada, Where Great Fortunes Were Made.

ABOUT a score of years ago Jim Butler, while chasing burros, stumbled on a rich outcropping of rock that, when assayed, gave high values in gold and silver, particularly silver. The place of the discovery, which is now, and has been for a decade or so, one of the steadiest and best producing camps in the west, is named Tonopah. The name is of Indian origin and means "Waterbrush." In addition to being a famous mining center, it is the home of Key Pittman, senior senator from the Sagebrush state. The people of Nevada are proud of the statesman who has long and ably represented them in the upper house of Congress. They stand by him, irrespective of party, because he is on the alert to safeguard their interests, because he is a distinguished legislator and because of the fact that he believes in the same high standards of fair dealing as do the people of the state which has given so much new wealth to mankind.

Nearly fifty years ago there came into the world at Vicksburg, Miss., a little black-haired youth, a tiny mite, with a line of distinguished ancestors, who held positions of honor and trust in the south; ancestors who were conservative yet constructive. Young Pittman was reared in the lap of luxury, every want could be gratified for the mere asking. As a young student he showed a remarkable analytical mind. Upon graduating from the Southwestern University the call of the west reached him. It became insistent, the spirit of adventure seized him and he headed for the country where skies are blue and sunshine bright. His primary object was to shoot elk in the Olympic forests and to spend weeks in the woods in order that he might gain a robust stature.

After enjoying three or four weeks of genuine sport, rumors of the progress of the towns around Puget sound reached Pittman and he accordingly invested his patrimony. It was at the time when every one was buying or selling in those boom towns, and as Pittman laughingly remarked, he "invested in every boom town in Puget sound." He further said that his investments were permanent. He never took anything away from these boom towns. After six months he was broke. He had neither the money nor the nerve to go home, so in order to carve out a fortune without the aid of the family purse, he plunged into the logging woods, where he secured employment at skinning the bark from trees. This was at a time when he hardly knew one end of an ax from another.

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THIS [illegible] was perhaps one of the most beneficial that ever happened to young Pittman, because it built up a physique that, while not huge, possessed amazing strength. Graduating from this school of the woods he left for Seattle, opening law offices there and at Mount Vernon, Wash. His practice almost at once became a lucrative one. Such creature comforts his large fees could provide were his. Then came the famous financial crash of the Baring Brothers. Pittman had received, in addition to cash, numerous notes of clients, but he found that these bits of paper had shrunk in value to a point where they were no longer good to pay board. Again the spirit of adventure seized him. He yearned for newer and fairer fields, so he presented his offices to a younger lawyer and to the judge of the court he gave his library. His little money he invested in a twelve-month stock of food, or "grub," as the prospector calls it, which consisted largely of bacon, beans, flour, rolled oats and dried apples. He sent on the steamer Queen for Alaska, from which point thrilling tales of gold discoveries had come. He was equipped with a pair of shoddy mackinaws, so shoddy that they would hardly do for a spring day in Washington. He likewise possessed a pair of hob-nailed boots. He was a tenderfoot with a capital T. The hob-nailed boots would have shortly resulted in frozen feet in that northern clime.

On the trip to Alaska Pittman and twenty others became involved in a row because one of the party had lost his spoons and forks. With this trouble settled, he went to Skagway, where he met a French-Canadian named Lashus, with whom he bunked until they were ready to hit the Skagway trail to Lake Bennett.

Both Pittman and Lashus each carried one hundred pounds on their backs every day as they "mushed" over this heart-breaking trail. The two intrepid seekers for opportunity whipsawed lumber from which they built their own boats and in them ran the Miles Canyon White Horse rapids. After a strenuous trip they arrived at Dawson with the floating ice. Delays and distribution of food to less fortunate pilgrims had reduced Pittman's cash assets to practically nil. In fact, a man who knew him in Alaska and from whom the writer has secured much of these data, stated that Pittman arrived in Dawson with exactly 10 cents in his pocket, and this was at a time when bacon and bean sandwiches were selling at $3 each. The next day after his arrival he was employed as an attorney in a big mining suit, but was denied the right to practice before the gold commissioner, even after he had passed his examination, because he had not served three years as an apprentice in the solicitor's office in Canada.

Disgusted with the unreasonable regulations of the Canadian government, Pittman temporarily forsook the law and worked with his own hands as a miner for over two years. Leaving Dawson, he proceeded to Nome, just after that famous camp was discovered, and he helped organize the "consent" form of government for the miners. The part he played in bringing order out of chaos resulted in his election as the first district attorney of that section. Realizing that the new district attorney occupied a position fraught with extreme danger, the authorities assigned three deputy marshals for duty in the courtroom to protect the district attorney while he prosecuted cases.

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THOSE who were in Alaska at the time said that although numerous attempts were made to assassinae Pittman and that numerous plots were hatched, the district attorney failed at any time to show the slightest sign of nervousness. Then Congress passed a law which resulted in many undesirable persons coming or being sent to Alaska, individuals who brought about conditions resulting in Rex Beach writing his famous novel, "The Spoilers." Pittman then became the attorney for the miners and others who owned mining claims.

Upon his last trip to the states, where he appeared before the circuit court at San Francisco, which court had jurisdiction in the cases, he heard of the "strike" made at Tonopah, and for those not familiar with the nomenclature of mining, "strike" in mining means a discovery. When he heard of the wonderful find, Pittman finished his legal work and proceeded to this new El Dorado. The train in those days ran as far as Sodaville, from which point it was necessary to stage it into the new camp. This ride took eighteen hours with three changes of horses. When he arrived at Tonapah he became interested in the mines and rapidly acquired one of the largest practices of any lawyer in the state. He had given but little thought to politics. With a number of friends he journeyed to Reno to witness the Jeffries and Johnson prize fight, and while there he accepted the nomination for the United State Senate on the democratic ticket to oppose the late George S. Nixon.

Nixon was popular, and had numerous mining and banking interests and knew nearly everybody in the state. After Pittman's nomination he approached Senator Nixon and suggested that the loser abide by the popular vote of the state, so that there might be no suspicion of corruption of the legislature. This was the first time in the history of the United States that such a proposition had been made. Pittman was defeated, but the legislature was democratic by three on joint ballot. Friends urged Pittman not to stand by the agreement, because they charged that Nixon's friends had spent considerable money in the fight. Pittman not only refused to heed these pleas, but went before the legislature and urged the democrats to vote for Nixon, stating that any other action would destroy the theory of popular government. The members of the legislature followed his advice, with the result that every democrat voted for Nixon. Then both the senate and assembly passed a joint resolution congratulating Pittman on the high stand he had taken in the matter.

Two years later, while Pittman was addressing the democratic state convention assembled to elect delegates to the Baltimore convention, news came that Senator Nixon was dying. Mr. Pittman expressed the hope that Senator Nixon would win his fight against death. After Senator Nixon's death Judge Massey was appointed by the governor, elected as a republican, to serve out the unexpired term. Pittman was nominated as his opponent. Judge Massey had occupied positions of trust in the state and had made many friends. The fight was a bitter one. It was clean cut throughout. The day after the election Pittman was one hundred votes behind on the returns and it was a week before the final result was announced. The contest was the subject of much betting between the friends of each candidate. The outside precincts, the farmers, the ranches and the mining camps brought in a total which gave Mr. Pittman the election by eighty-nine votes. The same agrement had existed between Judge Massey and Pittman as had existed between Senator Nixon and Pittman. The legislature gave its unanimous vote for Pittman. After having served through the unexpired term to which he had been elected, Senator Pittman was again nominated and elected by a plurality of over 2,400.

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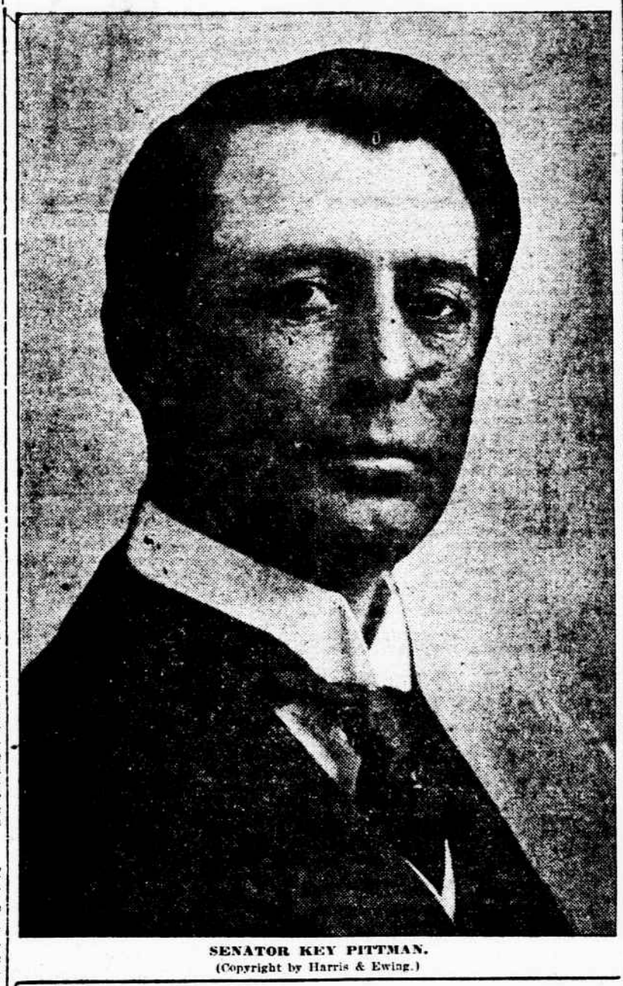
BY birth and raising Senator Key Pittman was a democrat; by experience and association in the west he became more independent, and while he has stood by the party of which he is a member in matters that have been purely political, he has never hesitated to vote as his conscience dictated, where he thought the matters came in conflict with the interests of the state he represented. He is not a devotee of theories—rather believes that theories should be adjusted to necessities—for instance, in 1913 he spoke for free raw wool on the ground that the tariff had nothing to do with wool. In the last Congress he voted for the tariff on wool because conditions had changed. He is for a tariff on raw materials as well as manufactured articles. He believes that tariffs should equalize conditions abroad and at home. He is opposed to tariffs that create monopolies, but realizes the necessity of a tariff that permits our own industries to live without lowering the social standards of our own people. He cares nothing about the theories of the past; he is solely niterested in problems as they are presented. He stood loyally by the former administration during the war, and is one of the group of senators who devised the plan to table the Gore resolution (to prevent the arming of American ships).

Senator Pittman does not bounce up in his seat every day or so and make a speech, but when he does address the Senate he speaks directly to the point. He has no patience with demagogues. He advocates the ratification of the peace treaty. He was not actuated by political desires to believe it was the only possible plan that would make world peace. He voted for the ratification of the treaty with mild reservations; he voted for the Lodge reservations; he voted for the amendments that would contain the principles in the covenant of the league of nations. He hates war, hates militarism; realizes the futility of all of it, and when all concert of nations was turned down and it appeared that the old order of force would be maintained, he favored a Navy that could conquer any navy in the world.

Senator Pittman is a patriotic American, and the writer of this story the other day secured from a government official the information that when this country declared war Senator Pittman had quietly gone to the War Department and waived all exemptions and asked to be allowed to serve. The official replied that under no circumstances would the department avail itself of his patriotic offer, because they realized that it was absolutely essential that he remain in the Senate. There is not today in the United States Senate a man who is more keenly desirous of giving the worker a chance than is the senior senator from Nevada. This is all the more remarkable because of the environment of his early life, reared amid luxury, removed from contact with those who gained their daily bread by the sweat of their brow, he gained but little knowledge of how the other half of the world lives until he came in contact with those who toil in the great northwest and later with those who labor in Nevada. In securing the passage of the bill which now bears his name, he practically saved the mining industry of the west. He has fought for over six years the ideas of the east in regard to leasing as it applies to land. He has fought it continuously, so that the rancher could turn arid regions into fertile fields and give the homeseeker an opportunity to become a producer. While figures are not available, it is more than probable that through his activities over 200,000 prospecting permits have been granted.

In 1904 the Miners' Union has objected to the contract system, and it seemed probable that there would be a clash between the Mine Owners' Association and the miners. Both sides called upon Mr. Pittman to act as a referee in the matter. He so skilfully adjusted the differences that the agreement was signed and it lasted until 1916, and, while other mining camps throughout the country were torn by strife, Tonopah remained a peaceful community. It was not until six years later, long after the agreement had expired, that differences arose in Tonopah between the mine owners and the miners. This may be called a war strike.

Senator Pittman stands about five feet eleven, is of the wiry athletic type, clean shaven, brown eyes, black hair shot with gray at the temples and is fond of all outdoor sports. He possesses an analytical mind, is an eloquent speaker and has a keen sense of humor. He is a practical statesman by training. He works incessantly for his constituents; he believes in the people of Nevada and the people believe in him.



SENATOR KEY PITTMAN.
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